

# ecoNews — Wire —

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**November 7, 2003**

For immediate release

- 1. Mercury found in drain of Davenport home**
- 2. Toxic nature of mercury requires safe handling**
- 3. Heavy rainfall causes Center Point bypass**

## **MERCURY FOUND IN DRAIN OF DAVENPORT HOME**

DAVENPORT —Davenport Hazardous Material personnel responded to a 911 call reporting liquid mercury in the floor drain of a Davenport home Tuesday.

The house's three residents were asked to temporarily relocate due to the toxic nature of mercury. The air within the house is being evacuated to remove the mercury vapors, which were above advisory levels near the floor drain. Testing will continue to determine when the residents can move back in to the house.

Cleanup was completed Thursday, with mercury removed from the drain and micro-particles of mercury removed from the floor. Approximately two to three tablespoons of mercury were recovered. An epoxy coating has been applied to the drain to keep any residual vapors from escaping.

The mercury did not enter the sewer system, thanks to a p-trap system in the drain, according to Eric Nold, on-scene coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA is currently investigating how the mercury got into the drain.

**Media questions should be directed to Eric Nold at (816) 718-4274.**

###

## **TOXIC NATURE OF MERCURY REQUIRES SAFE HANDLING**

DES MOINES — The recent evacuation of a Davenport home due to the presence of two to three tablespoons of mercury in a floor drain emphasizes the importance of safely handling the substance.

Exposure to the vapors of liquid mercury — the type found in thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs and some medical equipment — can lead to serious health risks. Short-term exposure can result in nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, increased blood pressure or heart rate, skin or eye irritation, and lung damage. Long-term exposure can affect the brain, causing tremors, memory problems and changes in vision or hearing.

“Even small amounts of mercury can be highly toxic,” said Kathy Lee, DNR environmental specialist senior.

Products containing mercury should be taken to a regional household hazardous material center for proper disposal.

“It doesn’t take a lot to exceed limits for mercury, even one thermometer,” said Terry Jones, environmental specialist with the DNR field office in Washington. “Mercury passes through wastewater plants untreated and re-enters streams, so it’s important to keep it out of landfills and drains.”

In the event that liquid mercury is spilled, evacuate and secure the spill area. Make sure that shoes and clothing have not been exposed to the mercury and close all doors and windows leading to other rooms. Ventilate the affected room by opening windows and doors that open only to the outside. Call the local health department or the Statewide Poison Control Center at 1-800-352-2222 for instructions on safe cleanup. Do not attempt to clean up liquid mercury without first contacting the local health department or poison control center.

“It’s important to immediately clean up a spill in your home, but contact local officials first,” Lee said. “When mercury is spilled inside the home, it can shatter and create hundreds of beads within the household.”

**For more information, contact Kathy Lee at (515) 725-0384.**

###

## **HEAVY RAINFALL CAUSES CENTER POINT BYPASS**

CENTER POINT — Pumps could not keep up with a four-inch rainfall near Center Point in Linn County Monday night, causing approximately 500,000 gallons of wastewater to bypass into Apple Creek.

A portable pump was used to send the excess into the creek, a tributary of Blue Creek. Blue Creek flows into the Cedar River above Shellsburg.

No fish kill is expected, and the DNR will continue to monitor the situation.

**For more information, call Sue Miller at DNR Field Office 1 at (563) 927-2640.**